

PANAMA CITY – U.S. Congressman Allen Boyd (D-North Florida) today brought together representatives from federal and state emergency response agencies and key local stakeholders to discuss the effect a hurricane would have on the oil currently in the Gulf of Mexico and the impact it would have on North Florida's communities. The conference also identified actions that need to be incorporated into current hurricane response plans in order to efficiently and effectively protect our communities and people from the threat posed by having oil propelled inland.

"We are two weeks into the hurricane season and already the first tropical depression has formed in the Atlantic. Oil in the Gulf during hurricane and tropical storm season is a real threat and one we must take proactive measures to deal with now," said Congressman Boyd. "Today's discussion revealed several challenges we will face if a storm strikes the Gulf in the coming months, as well as the actions we will need to take in order to best protect our people and our communities."

Congressman Boyd continued: "I will be taking these action items, following up with the appropriate agencies, and delivering our recommendations and findings to the President and his Administration. Today's conference convened some of Florida's top emergency response agencies, leaders from our military, and key stakeholders. The recommendations assembled by these experts will help protect our people and region from this threat, and the federal government should work to include these suggestions in a coordinated federal response plan."

Participants agreed that if a storm was to strike the Gulf now, its impact on North Florida could be disastrous: booms would be compromised; vessels of opportunity would have to be moved; oil under the water's surface could be brought up; ongoing clean-up efforts would be forced to cease; and oil could be carried inland for miles, contaminating roads, homes, schools and businesses.

The conference identified several planning and action items that need to be taken to better brace for the effects a storm would have on the oil in the Gulf, including but not limited to:

- **Revising the Existing Command and Control Structure so that federal agencies better support and incorporate current local and state response organizations:** Florida's local and state response agencies are the gold standard in preparing and recovering from

disasters, such as hurricanes. The federal agencies that would be needed in the event of a hurricane striking while oil is in the Gulf should work within the current local and state command and control structure so as to best coordinate preparedness efforts.

- **Scientifically Analyzing Oil Danger Zones:** Florida's 11 state universities and colleges have established the Oil Spill Academic Task Force. This group could be employed to evaluate the contamination levels of the state's water quality and food supply, as well as the oil's long-term effect on our local fisheries and environment.

- **Ensuring Prompt and Adequate Public Information Distribution:** In the immediate aftermath of a storm, the public will rightfully have many questions about the availability of basic government services as well as the ability for them to return to their way of life. Ensuring the prompt and efficient dissemination of information – such as the accessibility of roads; the status of local water supplies; whether fisheries are opened or closed; and whether hotels and other tourism facilities are operating – is vital.

Participants included experts in the field of contingency planning, environmental issues, food safety, tourism, emergency response and command & control, including but not limited to representatives from U.S. Department of Defense, FEMA, National Guard, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association and other federal agencies, as well as state agencies such as the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Department of Agriculture, and the Florida Division of Emergency Management. Local stakeholders also participated, including county Emergency Operations Center Directors, county tourism bureaus, and local elected officials. The conference also included representatives from British Petroleum.

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